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Bushnell, Charles Ira.

The claim of Trinity church to  
having furnished burial places  
for some of the American  
prisoners who died in the Old  
Sugar House Prison, in Liberty street,  
during the Revolution, examined and  
refuted.

New York, 1863.



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THE CLAIM  
OF  
TRINITY CHURCH  
TO HAVING FURNISHED BURIAL PLACES  
FOR SOME OF THE  
AMERICAN PRISONERS,  
WHO DIED IN THE  
OLD SUGAR HOUSE PRISON.  
IN LIBERTY STREET, DURING THE REVOLUTION.  
EXAMINED AND REFUTED.

Bushnell, Charles Ira

NEW-YORK:  
PRIVATELY PRINTED.

1863.

*W. W. W.*

E2 81  
1911



To

TRINITY CHURCH,

SO

"PATRIOTIC" IN THE REVOLUTION,

THIS

PAMPHLET

IS

DEDICATED.



## P R E F A C E .

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WHILE writing a Memoir of Levi Hanford, a Revolutionary soldier, and a prisoner in the Old Sugar House in Liberty Street from March, 1777 to April, 1778, I had occasion to investigate the subject of the interment of American prisoners by the British during the Revolution.

The following, which originally appeared as a note to the memoir, is the result of that investigation. Believing the subject to be of some general interest, a few copies have been struck off in this separate form, for the use of such as desire them.



## REFUTATION.

"On a high hill, near where Franklin Street now is, on the east side of Broadway, there formerly stood a water basin, built before the Revolution, for supplying the city with water. Nearly opposite the water basin, on the west side of Broadway, stood an old fort, built of earth, which had been used during the Revolutionary war. On the outside of this fort, on the slope of the hill, were buried many of the American prisoners of war, who had died in the old Sugar House in Liberty Street, then Crown Street, or in the North Dutch Church in William Street, both of which were used as prisons by the British. These bodies were buried so near the surface, that by the slight washing of the hill their bones were exposed, and many a time, when a boy, have I seen their remains pulled out and abused by my thoughtless companions—as late as 1800."

*Cozzens' Geology of New York Island, page 22.*

Mr. Onderdonk, in speaking of the old Sugar House in Liberty Street, at the time when it was used as a prison, says: "For

many weeks the dead-cart visited the prison every morning, into which eight or twelve corpses were flung and piled up, like sticks of wood, and dumped into *ditches in the outskirts of the city.*"

Onderdonk's Rev. Incidents of Suffolk and Kings Counties, p. 208.

Mr. Jonathan Gillette, a native of West Hartford, Conn., who died on the 14th day of March, 1855, aged 93 years, was a prisoner in the Sugar House in Liberty Street, in the year 1780, and was confined there for ten months. He says, "Almost every day the corpse of one, and sometimes five or six were carried out for burial. They were conveyed to the *Bowery*, near the *Fresh Water Pump*, where they were interred."

The place where Mr. Hanford witnessed the burial of the prisoners, was not in any church-yard, but was in the trenches of the fortifications, which had been made by the Americans previous to the evacuation of New York, in the year 1776, in what was then considered the *upper part of the city*. It was somewhere in the neighborhood of where Grand Street now is, but may not have been quite so high up. The city was dug full of trenches, in and around it, and into these the prisoners were thrown, and were scarcely furnished earth, much less coffins for their burials. The British did not dig graves for the prisoners, and hence were not usually inclined to bury them in church-yards or regular burying places, but threw them in wherever it was convenient. The mode of burial of those who died in the prison-ships is well known. The remains of those who died in the prisons on land were not more favored than they. During the occupation of the city by the British, much mortality prevailed among the troops, and the burials said to have been made in Trinity Church yard, were probably those of British soldiers, or from the Tory regiments. Mr. Hanford had no knowledge of any American prisoners having been buried there by the British,

and always scouted at the idea. Having been a prisoner for fourteen months, he certainly would have known if such had been the fact. When the troubles with England commenced, the Episcopal Churches almost unanimously took sides with the mother country, and were friends of the British, and when the City of New York was taken possession of, they were recognized as loyal branches of the Established Church of England, and as such were protected from profanation, while the churches of other denominations were converted into store-houses, hospitals, prisons, riding-schools, and even stables for British cavalry. The British being in possession of the Episcopal grounds, they were not at all likely to desecrate them by making them the receptacle of the rebel dead. They were not likely to honor or favor those, regarded as criminals and outlaws by a burial in consecrated ground whom, while living, they had starved and ill treated, and whom they had allowed to languish and die in vile, pestilential prisons. The churches themselves were opposed to such burials. They did not want their grounds filled with the bodies of those who, while living, were in open rebellion not only against their king, but also the Established Church. Under these circumstances, the British certainly would not select such spots when the whole city was open before them, and would by no means be apt to pay the fee for interring bodies there, when they could be buried elsewhere for nothing. If a prisoner had Tory influence enough to insure his interment there, the same influence would have insured his release from captivity, and from the treatment and mode of life which caused or accelerated his decease.

Moreover, Mr. Inglis, the pastor of the church, was himself a bitter Tory, and took an active and decided part, as is well known, and as the records of the church will show. He would have raised both hands against any such desecration. His prayers for the king were vehement and unceasing, and he refused to omit them even during the presence of Washington himself at

the church, although previously requested so to do by one of that General's own officers. Would he, who refused this civility to a member and a communicant of the church, be at all likely to grant an Episcopal burial to a prisoner confined for being a rebel, and who died firm and unshaken in his defection? Those noble patriots, those suffering martyrs were not so favored. No soothing words consoled their dying hours; no tones of pity softened their afflictions, and it may well be believed that no Episcopal services attended their remains to their place of interment.

The remains which are said to have been discovered in excavating the ground for the erection of the monument to the Martyrs, appearing to have been hastily and promiscuously made, and without coffins, were probably the remains of paupers, for that ground was used as a Potter's Field for many years before the Revolution—in fact as early as 1703 or 1704. When the British held possession of the city, they had full control of everything, and is it not natural that they would have protected from desecration the grounds containing their own friends and relatives, and grounds attached to and belonging to their own Established Church? Would not their vigilance after the destruction of the church by fire, have been still greater than before? If the grounds were then left more open and exposed, is it at all probable that they would have been less guarded and protected? But one conclusion, therefore, remains, which is, that the remains of those found there *without* coffins were the remains of paupers, while those found there *with* coffins were not the relics of prisoners, for they were uniformly buried without them, and in places not consecrated, and not in the heart of the city, but at *such distances from it* as would prevent the residents from being infected by the effluvia arising from their half-covered bodies while in course of decomposition. During the discussion of these questions, some years ago, Mr. Hanford was referred to, and he al-



ways contended that no prisoners were interred by the British in the grounds of that church during the Revolution.

It has been said that the Negro burying ground on the site of Stewart's marble store, corner of Broadway and Chambers Street, and the Jews' burial-ground, on the location now known as Chatham Square, were used as places of interment for American prisoners. Such might have been the case, for the British despised the Jews and their religion, and had no respect whatever for either of those burial-places, and if they buried any prisoners in either of those localities, they did so with the intention of casting a stigma upon them, for they no doubt considered **any** such interments made by them as an indignity and disgrace.

Before putting the above in type, I sent the manuscript to W. B. Hanford, Esq., for inspection, and with its return received from him the following letter, which I take the liberty to append :—

“ FRANKLIN, N. Y., Sept. 21, 1863.

CHAS. J. BUSHNELL, ESQ.,

*My Dear Sir ;—*Your favor of the 14th instant is before me. \* \* I have examined the manuscript enclosed, but have no alterations to suggest. It is, I think, correct as it stands, and will give a just view of the facts in relation to the claim of Trinity Church to the honor of furnishing a receptacle for deceased prisoners, and will entitle you to the gratitude of the public for setting the matter right before them.

Yours, in Fraternal Regards,

WM. B. HANFORD.”













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